

Was There Official Anti-Semitism in the USSR After World War 2?

In late 1948 and early 1949, public life in the Soviet Union veered toward anti-Semitism. The new line was set, indirectly but discernibly, by Pravda on 28 January 1949. An article on "unpatriotic theater critics," who were "bearers of stateless cosmopol-

itanism," began a campaign of denunciation of Jews in every sphere of professional life. Pravda purged itself of Jews in early March. Jewish officers were cashiered from the Red Army and Jewish activists removed from leadership positions in the communist party. ...Jewish writers who had taken an interest in Yiddish culture or in the German murder of Jews found themselves under arrest. As Grossman recalled, "Throughout the whole of the USSR it seemed that only Jews thieved and took bribes, only Jews were criminally indifferent towards the sufferings of the sick, and only Jews published vicious or badly written books."¹² (348)

Sources (n. 12 p. 502):

- * "On the *Pravda* article, see Kostyrchenko, *Shadows*, 152."
- * "On the decreased number of Jews in high party positions (thirteen percent to four percent from 1945 to 1952), see Kostyrchenko, *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm*, 352."
- * "The Grossman quotation is from Chandler's translation of *Everything Flows*.

The *Pravda* editorial discussed by **Kostyrchenko** was written by Aleksandr A. Fadeev, General Secretary of the Writers Union, and David I. Zaslavskii, a longtime editor of *Pravda* and of Jewish background himself. The article is available online at a number of places.⁸ Many, though not all, of the theatre critics who are criticized in it do have recognizably Jewish names. But that in itself does not make the article anti-Semitic, despite the claims of Kostyrchenko and others. It's impossible to criticize anyone without mentioning that person's name. It is not anti-Semitic to criticize a Jewish writer. And the criticism in the *Pravda* editorial is not anti-Semitic at all. Rather, it is directed against criticism that belittled Soviet culture in comparison to Western European culture.

⁸ At <http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/69512> and <http://www.ihst.ru/projects/sohist/books/cosmopolit/100.htm>

By 1952 the percentage of persons “of Jewish origin” in Party organizations had indeed declined to approximately the percentage of Jews in the Soviet population (the correct reference is to the table in **Kostyrchenko**, *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm* pp. 353-355). But this is not evidence of anti-Semitism either. Previously the percentage of Jews in high positions in the Party and cultural spheres had been two or more times their proportion in the population. The large-scale *overrepresentation* of Jews in these fields was only possible if other nationalities were seriously *underrepresented*. Reducing the percentage of Jews was inevitable as the percentage of other nationalities was increased.

It was also inevitable that there would be an increase in anti-Semitism in the USSR after the war. Tens of millions of Soviet citizens had lived for several years under German occupation and been subject to an unprecedented barrage of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda. Nationalists among the Baltic, Belorussian, and Ukrainian population had promoted anti-Semitism too, often more vehemently than the Germans did. This was bound to leave its mark on postwar Soviet society. But Snyder is not discussing *this* anti-Semitism.

Stalin Opposed Anti-Semitism

In the paragraph cited above, Snyder writes:

A few dozen Jewish poets and novelists who used Russian literary pseudonyms found their real or prior names published in parentheses. (348)

This is true — and it was Stalin himself who reacted vehemently against it. Stalin opposed the publication of Jewish names after the “pen” names of authors. Noted Soviet author, war correspondent, and editor of literary journals Konstantin Simonov records the following:

- Почему Мальцев, а в скобках стоит Ровинский?
В чем дело? До каких пор это будет
продолжаться? В прошлом году уже говорили
на эту тему, запретили представлять на
премию, указывая двойные фамилии. Зачем это
делается? Зачем пишется двойная фамилия?

Если человек избрал себе литературный псевдоним - это его право, не будем уже говорить ни о чем другом, просто об элементарном приличии. Человек имеет право писать под тем псевдонимом, который он себе избрал. Но, видимо, кому-то приятно подчеркнуть, что у этого человека двойная фамилия, подчеркнуть, что это еврей. Зачем это подчеркивать? Зачем это делать? Зачем насаждать антисемитизм? Кому это надо? Человека надо писать под той фамилией, под которой он себя пишет сам. Человек хочет иметь псевдоним. Он себя ощущает так, как это для него самого естественно. Зачем же его тянуть, тащить назад? ⁹

Translated:

Why 'Mal'tsev', and then 'Rovinskii' in parentheses? What's going on here? How long is this going to continue? ... Why is this being done? We already spoke about this last year, forbidding double last names in works presented for the [Stalin] prize. Why write a double last name? If a person has chosen a literary pseudonym — that's his right. We're not speaking of anything other than elementary decency. A person has the right to write under a pseudonym he has chosen for himself. But, obviously, somebody wants to emphasize that this person has a double name, to emphasize that he is a Jew. Why emphasize that? Why do that? Why spread anti-Semitism? Who benefits from that? We must write down a person with the surname that the person himself has chosen. A person wishes to have a pseudonym; he himself feels that this is natural for him. So why pull him, drag him back?

⁹ Konstantin Simonov. *Glazami cheloveka moego pokoleniya*. Moscow: Novosti, 1988, p. 216. Also online at http://www.hrono.info/libris/lib_s/simonov16.php